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Former female leader gets award

By NELLIE SETEPANO

FORMER politician and woman leader Dame Josephine Abaijah yesterday received a prestigious United States award for women, recognising her efforts in leadership and politics.

She received the International Women of Courage Award, an American award presented annually by the US Department of State to women around the world who have shown leadership, courage, resourcefulness and willingness to sacrifice for others, especially for better promotion of women's rights.

She was recognised for her efforts in PNG politics and leadership. The award was presented by the US deputy assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific public affairs, Dennise Mathieu.

Dame Josephine Abaijah, from Milne Bay, was the first woman to be elected to the House of Assembly in 1972 and the only woman elected at that time. She was re-elected in 1977, and stood unsuccessfully for a third term in 1982. After 15 years out of parliament, she was elected once more in 1997.

At the same time, she also headed the National Council of Women.

She founded a movement called Papua Besena, which agitated unsuccessfully for Papua to become a completely independent country on its own instead of being linked with New Guinea as Papua New Guinea.

She thanked the US government and US Ambassador Walter North for her recognition at a women's forum co-



DAME Josephine Abaijah showing her award.

hosted by the Department of Community Development and the United States Embassy.

PM: More to to be done for women

PRIME Minister Peter O'Neill told a women's forum in Port Moresby yesterday that there is more to do to advance women in Papua New Guinea.

The prime minister said successive governments had done their fair share to try to advance the role and profile of women in PNG.

A number of initiatives had been launched and resources allocated to empower women on education, public service, business and decision making, he said.

He told participants that they were in the forum because obviously, there was more to be done.

He said recognising the potential in our women, and the benefits to our community in promoting women, our government introduced legislations and made some key decisions

to ensure there was progress.

Prime Minister O'Neill said the Government passed the Family Protection Bill to give more legal protection to mothers at home.

"We amended the criminal code so any attack on our mothers and sisters because of sorcery related beliefs becomes a serious offence; we introduced tough legislations to combat human trafficking, so we protect our vulnerable young women.

"A lot more has to be done and my government stands ready to listen to you," he told the forum.

He said he was aware that the forum would discuss key issues on empowering the next generation; how groups could be agents of change; enhancing educational opportunities; helping women live healthi-

er lives; encourage men and youth to combat gender based violence; get more women into business and harness the power of technology to empower women.

The prime minister said he hoped that the forum would develop strategies to guide those attending to promote gender equality and empower women.

He further told women that the Government was committed to the advancement on the status of women in PNG by setting up and funding an office of development for women, which will be within the Department of Community Development.

This office will be funded in the budget starting next year, so that it is fully resourced to promote the initiatives to advance the empowerment of women in PNG.

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